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For Immediate Release

IMERT Training at Governors State University

University Park, September 13, 2006 - Before Katrina, before 9/11, there was a growing awareness of the need for a special medical response team in Illinois. This team of doctors, nurses, paramedics, and emergency medical technicians would be trained and ready to assist local emergency responders in cases of extreme and catastrophic man-made or natural disasters.

While such a disaster has not befallen people in Illinois, IMERT, the Illinois Medical Emergency Response Team, which boasts 1200 volunteers from across the state, was established to assist local emergency responders deal with catastrophic emergencies.

"Ideally, we do not want to be deployed," explains Dr. Moses Lee, Medical Director of IMERT, senior attending physician in emergency medicine at Stroger Hospital of Cook County, and assistant clinical professor at Rush Medical University.

"But if we are, we must be ready for all possible emergency scenarios from bombs to chemical or biological catastrophes to natural disasters."

Since its creation seven years ago, IMERT volunteers have responded to calls for assistance in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the recent summertime heat wave and power outages in Chicago.

"For most emergencies, we have great local emergency responders, but if they are overwhelmed, we are ready. We constantly train for that day, but hope it never comes."

The extensive training IMERT members receive has expanded and become more effective since IMERT teamed with Governors State University in University Park.

Rebecca Erickson of Oak Forest, a paramedic with the Forest Park Fire Department and an IMERT volunteer, is also an anatomy instructor at Governors State University.

"We have a cadaver lab at the university which is used to instruct occupational and physical therapy students. IMERT was able to purchase two cadavers which Governors State stores for us. They allow us to use their lab for training sessions on Saturday mornings," says Erickson. Each year, the university will provide two new cadavers for continued IMERT training, while the older IMERT cadavers will become learning tools for anatomy students.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for IMERT volunteers," says Lee. "It is critical that our responders understand the variety that exists in the human anatomy. No books or computers can emulate that. Cadavers provide an essential learning experience."

According to Erickson, "Practicing these emergency procedures on real bodies hones skills that will give our emergency responders a better chance of saving victims of disasters."

On a recent Saturday morning, IMERT volunteers from as far away as Champaign attended a three-hour training session led by Lee and Erickson.

"We begin by explaining anatomy lab procedures," said Lee. "The most important point I make is that we must respect the gift that the deceased and their families have given us. This is an important learning opportunity that we have because of their generosity."

"The procedures we practiced in training today are not done daily, but would be needed if we were called to an emergency response," added Erickson. "In the field, once a nurse or paramedic begins a procedure, they are committed. This lab experience is invaluable. We limit the number of trainees so that they each can get hands-on practice."

During the session, participants learned and practiced several procedures including airway access and vascular access procedures. "We cannot reproduce the disaster situation, but we can expose them to several methods of helping victims," says Lee. "Some methods are more effective than others and sometimes it is necessary to try several before they succeed."

IMERT training, according to Lee, is a continuous process. "There is always more to learn. We hope IMERT is not called, but we must be ready if we are. We hope to expand these training opportunities to include more IMERT volunteers learning from their experience in the Governors State anatomy lab."

